THE LINGERING IMPACT OF WORDS: VERBAL BULLYING, EMOTION REGULATION, AND FORGIVENESS AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SINGKAWANG

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ABSTRACT

Verbal bullying is a prevalent issue among adolescents, with significant implications for their emotional well-being. This research aims to explore the correlation between verbal bullying, emotion regulation, and forgiveness among high school students in Singkawang. The research used quantitative methods and involved 669 students at a high school, consisting of students aged 15 to 18 years in Singkawang, Kalimantan Barat, Indonesia. The measurement tools employed were the Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale (MPVS) for verbal bullying, the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) for emotion regulation, and the Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-18) for forgiveness. A Spearman correlation analysis was conducted due to non-normally distributed data. The results reveal no meaningful relationship between verbal bullying and emotion regulation with $r = 0.078$ and $p < 0.05$, as the correlation coefficient is very close to zero despite reaching statistical significance. However, a negative correlation was found between verbal bullying and forgiveness with $r = -0.193$ and $p < 0.01$, suggesting that students who experience more verbal bullying tend to exhibit lower forgiveness. Additionally, no significant correlation was found between emotion regulation and forgiveness with $r = -0.031$ and $p = 0.431$. These findings highlight the complex dynamics between bullying, emotional coping mechanisms, and forgiveness among victims, emphasizing the need for interventions that address emotional regulation and forgiveness skills to support victims of bullying. Further research is recommended to explore potential mediating factors that could explain the relationships between these variables.

Keywords: *verbal bullying, emotion regulation, forgiveness, high school students*

1. PREFACE

Bullying is a persistent issue that has garnered significant attention from both academics and educators. It is commonly defined as aggressive and intentional behavior repeated over time, targeting individuals who find it difficult to defend themselves (Olweus et al., 1999; Whitney & Smith, 1993). Rigby (2002) expanded on this definition by emphasizing the systematic misuse of power inherent in bullying behaviors. Bullying can manifest in various forms, including physical, verbal, relational, and cyberbullying (Coloroso, 2005; Slonje & Smith, 2008).

Verbal bullying, which includes insults, name-calling, and spreading rumors, is the second most common form of bullying after physical bullying, according to data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (Putra, 2024). While it does not leave physical marks, verbal bullying can have serious, long-term effects on the mental health of victims. Despite its prevalence, verbal bullying is often underestimated compared to physical bullying, yet it can be equally damaging, impacting victims' emotional regulation and academic performance (Ellisyani & Setiawan, 2016; Syarifuddin et al., 2023).

Recent studies have shown that victims of bullying frequently face difficulties in emotion regulation, leading to prolonged emotional disturbances (Camodeca & Nava, 2020; Vacca et al., 2023). Proper emotion regulation skills are essential, as they allow individuals to manage and express their emotions effectively, mitigating the negative impacts of bullying experiences.

Effective emotion regulation can aid in reducing the adverse psychological outcomes associated with bullying, such as anxiety and depression (Djingga et al., 2023; Kogoya & Jannah, 2021).

Forgiveness also plays a crucial role in the psychological recovery of bullying victims. Research indicates that individuals with higher levels of forgiveness tend to be more resilient and less prone to retaliatory behaviors, which helps in alleviating emotional distress and promoting psychological well-being (Juwita & Kustanti, 2020; Kravchuk, 2021). Forgiveness encourages positive emotional transformation, replacing anger and resentment with empathy and compassion, thereby enhancing victims' overall well-being (Barcaccia et al., 2018; Inuhan et al., 2024).

While research on bullying is abundant in larger cities across Indonesia, smaller cities like Singkawang remain underexplored, particularly in the context of verbal bullying. Singkawang is a small city located in West Kalimantan, known for its unique multicultural population, including Chinese, Malay, and Dayak communities (Irfani, 2018). Its distinct sociocultural environment makes it a valuable setting for examining social issues like bullying, especially verbal bullying, which has been documented but insufficiently addressed. Singkawang presents a unique setting for studying this issue, as existing research indicates the presence of verbal bullying cases in local schools (Kamaruddin et al., 2023; Mariana et al., 2021).

The importance of addressing verbal bullying in such settings cannot be overstated, as the lack of awareness may lead to underreporting and inadequate support for victims. Despite these studies, research focusing specifically on the impact of verbal bullying on emotion regulation and forgiveness among high school students in Singkawang is still lacking. This study aims to explore the correlation between verbal bullying, emotion regulation, and forgiveness among high school students in Singkawang, contributing to the limited body of research on this topic in smaller urban areas. Understanding these dynamics is crucial not only for enriching the literature on bullying but also for providing actionable insights for local educators and policymakers in developing targeted interventions.

2. RESEARCH METHOD
Samples
Participants of this research are high school students from age 15 to 18 years old. The sample was obtained using a purposive sampling technique (Palinkas et al., 2015). There are 669 participants consisting of 447 female students and 343 male students. Based on the class, there are 231 tenth-grade students, 232 eleventh-grade students, and 206 twelve-grade students.

Measurement
Verbal bullying was measured using the Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale (MPVS) developed by Mynard and Joseph (2000) and adapted into Bahasa Indonesia by Ivanka & Dewi (2024). This instrument consists of 16 items, with this study focusing on 8 items specifically related to verbal bullying. The MPVS uses a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 3. Scale 1 means "Never", scale 2 means "Once", and scale 3 means "More than once". The instrument assesses four dimensions starting from physical, social, verbal, and property attacks. This research uses the social and verbal dimensions.

Emotion regulation was measured using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) developed by Gross and John (2003) and adapted into Bahasa Indonesia by Hartono & Monika (2024). The ERQ consists of 10 items and uses a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7. Scale 1 means

"Strongly disagree", scale 2 means "Disagree", scale 3 means "Slightly disagree", scale 4 means "Neutral", scale 5 means "Slightly agree", scale 6 means "Agree", and scale 7 means "Strongly agree". The ERQ assesses two dimensions, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Forgiveness was measured using the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-18) developed by McCullough et al. (2006) and McCullough (2013), and adapted into Bahasa Indonesia by Gracia (2020). The TRIM-18 consists of 18 items, using a 1-to-5-point Likert scale. Scale 1 means "Strongly disagree", scale 2 means "Disagree", scale 3 means "Neither agree nor disagree", scale 4 means "Agree", and scale 5 means "Strongly agree". The instrument measures three dimensions, avoidance motivations, revenge motivations, and benevolence motivations.

Data collection and analysis
The data collection process began with approval to conduct research from Tarumanagara University. The researcher sent research permission letters to the school and provided informed consent to students via Google Form questionnaire. Data processing and analysis in this research used a quantitative approach with the help of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Analysis with SPSS was used to test the relationship between verbal bullying, emotional regulation, and forgiveness.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Bullying Verbal Dimensions

Dimensions	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Social	1.00	3.00	1.8995	0.52384
Verbal	1.00	3.00	1.8830	0.53232

Table 1 shows the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation for each dimension of the verbal bullying variable. The mean scores for each dimension are above the minimum value (one), indicating that most participants in this study experienced relatively high levels of verbal bullying. The results show that the social dimension has a slightly higher average score than the verbal dimension, although the difference between the two is minimal. This suggests that students are more likely to experience bullying in social contexts rather than direct verbal forms, but both types are significant in their experiences.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of Emotion Regulation Dimensions

Dimensions	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Cognitive Reappraisal	1.67	7.00	4.3505	1.47532
Expressive Suppresion	1.00	7.00	4.1431	1.42764

Table 2 shows the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation for each dimension of emotion regulation. The cognitive reappraisal dimension has a higher mean score than expressive suppression, suggesting that participants tend to manage emotions by reframing how they think about emotional situations, rather than by suppressing their emotional expressions. This implies that students are more likely to regulate their emotions by altering their perspective on triggering situations.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of Forgiveness Dimensions

Dimensions	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Avoidance Motivations	1.00	4.86	2.6143	0.79337
Revenge Motivations	1.00	5.00	3.1626	0.98088
Benevolence Motivations	1.00	5.00	3.1188	0.84922

Table 3 shows the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation for each dimension of forgiveness. The revenge motivations dimension has the highest mean score compared to avoidance and benevolence motivations, indicating that participants tend to be more inclined toward revenge than avoiding those who hurt them or showing goodwill. However, forgiveness-related motivations vary among students, with a general tendency leaning more toward revenge.

Table 4
Normality Test Using One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov

	Verbal Bullying	Emotion Regulation	Forgiveness
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	0.079	0.045	0.039
p	0.000	0.003	0.018

Table 4 shows the results of the normality test using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The p-values for all variables are below 0.05, indicating that the data is not normally distributed for verbal bullying with $Z = 0.079$ and $p = 0.000$, emotion regulation with $Z = 0.045$ and $p = 0.003$, and also forgiveness with $Z = 0.039$ and $p = 0.018$. Since the assumption of normality is violated, non-parametric statistical methods were required. Therefore, the Spearman correlation test was used to analyze the relationships between the variables (verbal bullying, emotion regulation, and forgiveness) because it is more suitable for data that does not follow a normal distribution.

Table 5
Correlation Analysis Between Variables

	Verbal Bullying x Emotion Regulation	Verbal Bullying x Forgiveness	Emotion Regulation x Forgiveness
r	0.078	- 0.193	- 0.031
p	0.043	0.000	0.431

Table 5 shows the results of the correlation analysis between verbal bullying, emotion regulation, and forgiveness. The results indicate that while the correlation between verbal bullying and emotion regulation was statistically significant ($r = 0.078$, $p = 0.043 < 0.05$), the correlation coefficient is very close to zero, suggesting no meaningful relationship between the two variables. This contrasts with prior studies, such as those by Vacca et al. (2023) and Camodeca & Nava (2020), which reported that bullying victims often experience significant difficulties in regulating emotions, such as heightened vigilance and emotional disturbances. The low value of the correlation found in the present study suggests that students exposed to verbal bullying may not face severe emotional regulation difficulties, potentially due to individual coping strategies or the nature of verbal bullying being less impactful on emotion regulation than other forms like physical bullying.

On the other hand, a negative correlation was found between verbal bullying and forgiveness with r = -0.193 and p = 0.000 < 0.01, indicating that as students experience more verbal bullying, their willingness to forgive decreases. This finding aligns with research by Syarifah and Indriana (2020), which emphasized that emotional wounds and desires for revenge make forgiveness a challenging process for bullying victims. Even students who demonstrate strong emotional regulation may still struggle to forgive, which contrasts with prior research by Ho et al. (2020) that found a positive relationship between emotion regulation and forgiveness. This discrepancy suggests that regulating emotions does not necessarily guarantee forgiveness in the context of bullying, especially verbal bullying.

Furthermore, this study found no significant correlation between emotion regulation and forgiveness with r = -0.031 and p = 0.431. This contradicts previous findings by Dwityaputri and Sakti (2015) and Aprilia & Nashori (2023), who reported a positive correlation between these variables. One possible explanation for this difference is that those studies examined different types of bullying, such as physical or cyberbullying, or explored the variables more generally, whereas the present study specifically focused on verbal bullying. These results underscore the importance of examining different types of bullying separately, as each form may influence the relationship between emotion regulation and forgiveness differently.

Table 6
Comparison Analysis of Verbal Bullying, Emotion Regulation, and Forgiveness Based on Various Factors

Factors	Verbal Bullying	Emotion Regulation	Forgiveness
Age	0.698	0.785	0.582
Gender	0.092	0.005 (significant)	0.008 (significant)
Class	0.113	0.485	0.167
Extracurricular	0.114	0.548	0.004 (significant)

Table 6 presents a comparison analysis using the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U test to examine whether verbal bullying, emotion regulation, and forgiveness differ across several factors, including age, gender, class level, and extracurricular activities. A significant difference was found in emotion regulation with p = 0.005 and forgiveness with p = 0.008 based on gender. Males reported stronger emotional regulation and higher levels of forgiveness than females, despite there being no significant difference in verbal bullying experiences between genders with p = 0.092. These findings provide insight into potential gender-specific coping mechanisms.

Previous studies, such as those by Juwita and Kustanti (2020), have suggested that males and females engage in different conflict resolution strategies, such as seeking social support or engaging in revenge behaviors. The current finding that males exhibit better emotion regulation and forgiveness suggests the possibility of gender-based differences in emotional coping that may deserve further exploration. In terms of extracurricular activities, the study found a significant difference in forgiveness with p = 0.004 among students involved in different activities. Those participating in religious and sports activities (Kerohanian, Olahraga) reported higher levels of both forgiveness and emotion regulation.

However, no significant differences were found for verbal bullying with p = 0.114 or emotion regulation with p = 0.548 across extracurricular groups. This finding highlights the positive impact of structured activities, particularly religious and sports programs, on students' emotional well-being and capacity for forgiveness. Participation in such activities may provide students with tools for emotional regulation and interpersonal growth, contributing to better outcomes in

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managing conflicts. No significant differences were found in verbal bullying, emotion regulation, or forgiveness across age groups or class levels.

This suggests that age and class level do not significantly influence students' experiences with verbal bullying or their abilities to regulate emotions and practice forgiveness. These findings indicate that emotional processes and responses to bullying remain relatively consistent throughout adolescence, regardless of a student's grade level or age. In summary, the study's findings suggest that gender and extracurricular involvement play a significant role in students' emotional regulation and forgiveness, while age and class level do not. Additionally, the unique impact of verbal bullying on emotion regulation and forgiveness highlights the importance of tailored interventions for different types of bullying.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the complex relationship between verbal bullying, emotion regulation, and forgiveness among high school students. The correlation analysis found no meaningful relationship between verbal bullying and emotion regulation, as the correlation coefficient was very close to zero, despite reaching statistical significance. This suggests that students' ability to regulate emotions is not substantially influenced by their experiences of verbal bullying, potentially due to individual coping mechanisms or the less disruptive nature of verbal bullying compared to other forms of bullying.

However, a negative correlation was found between verbal bullying and forgiveness, indicating that increased bullying experiences reduce students' ability to forgive, reinforcing the idea that emotional wounds and desires for revenge make forgiveness a challenging process. Interestingly, no significant correlation was found between emotion regulation and forgiveness, diverging from prior research. This discrepancy suggests that verbal bullying affects these psychological variables differently compared to other forms of bullying, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions.

These findings underscore the importance of fostering emotional regulation and forgiveness skills to support bullying victims. Additionally, gender differences were significant, with males reporting stronger emotional regulation and higher forgiveness levels than females. However, age and class level showed no significant effects on verbal bullying, emotion regulation, or forgiveness, suggesting these factors remain stable across adolescence. Future research should explore potential mediating factors that could clarify the dynamics between these variables. Effective interventions must address both emotional coping strategies and forgiveness to foster better psychological recovery for victims of verbal bullying.

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